

Common Sense Rules of the Road

Our kids are growing up in public

When we were growing up, a permanent record was something your school kept. Now, our kids create lasting records of their lives whenever they post something online. In a world where anything can be copied, pasted, altered and distributed in the blink of an eye to a vast invisible audience, kids must understand that they hold the key to what kind of reputation they create for themselves. Here are a few rules of the road that will help our kids as they grow up in public:

Rules of the Road for Kids

- 1. Guard your privacy.** What people know about you is up to you.
- 2. Protect your reputation.** Self-reflect before you self-reveal. What's funny or edgy today could cost you tomorrow.
- 3. Nothing is private online.** Anything you say or do can be copied, pasted, and sent to gazillions of people without your permission.
- 4. Assume everyone is watching.** There's a huge, vast audience out there. If someone is your friend's friend, they can see everything.
- 5. Apply the Golden Rule.** If you don't want it done to you, don't do it to someone else.
- 6. Watch the clock.** A virtual hug never matches a real one. Balance your life.
- 7. Choose wisely.** Not all content is appropriate. You know what we mean.
- 8. Don't hide.** Using anonymity to cloak your actions doesn't turn you into a trustworthy, responsible human being.
- 9. Think about what you see.** Just because it's online doesn't make it true.
- 10. Be smart, be safe.** Not everyone is who they say they are. But you know that.

Rules of the Road for Parents

- 1. Model good behavior.** If we're on our Blackberries or iPhones at dinner, why will our kids listen to us when we tell them to turn theirs off?
- 2. Pay attention.** We have to know where our kids are going online — and what they're doing there.
- 3. Impart our values.** Cheating, lying, being cruel — they're all non-starters. Right and wrong extends to online and mobile life.
- 4. Establish limits.** Phone time, video download time, destinations. There's really a right time and place for everything.
- 5. Encourage balance.** Get kids involved in offline activities — especially where there's no cell service.
- 6. Make kids accountable.** If they have a privilege, make sure they earn it.
- 7. Explain what's at stake.** Let kids know that what they do today can be abused by someone tomorrow.
- 8. Find ways to say "yes."** That means we have to do some homework and know the sites they visit, the songs they download, etc. — and find ways to use technology that lets us say "yes" more often than we say "no."
- 9. It's not rocket science.** Learn to text, send a mobile photo, set up a Facebook page, upload a video. Or have your kids show you how. It's impossible to guide what you don't understand. Not only that, but think of all the anxiety you can avoid by knowing how things work.
- 10. Lighten up, embrace their world, and enjoy the possibilities together.** None of us want digital divides in our relationships with our kids. It's up to us to join the fun and help them seize the potential.